



Research Thesis

**The Existence of Leadership
as Phenomena**

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Engineering**

University of Technology, Sydney

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Certificate of authorship/originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive letter 'h' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

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In memory of my father, Robert David Simpson, 1922-2012.

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Abstract

Toward the end of my research I came to doubt the existence of 'leadership'. My doubt emerged as a strange uneasiness and I began to recognise that other writers had described something similar. Rather than proceed on the assumption that 'leadership' existed I decided to address my loss of faith directly and ask 'does leadership exist?'.

In order to address my fundamental uncertainty I needed to change my research approach. In effect I started my research again, adopting as my method a critical and analytical form of autoethnography. Empirical material is now drawn not just from my conversations with others but also my own experience of researching and practicing 'leadership'. As analytical autoethnography is relatively new I adapted guidance provided for group reflective practice (Fook & Gardner 2007; Stacey & Griffin 2005) as the framework for my analytical approach.

Analysis and interpretation is interleaved within the narrative, and set against a theoretical background provided by key references. Research validity is an issue for autoethnography and to maintain research validity I was guided by several papers by Alvesson and his associates ((Alvesson, Hardy & Harley 2008; Alvesson & Kärreman 2007; Alvesson & Sandberg 2011, 2012; Sandberg & Alvesson 2011; Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman 2009).

My narrative tells the story of my involvement in an attempt to build a 'leadership' culture, my evaluation of the outcome of that attempt, and my continuing engagement with theory to interpret what had occurred. Writing this narrative has altered my perspective of what people describe when they talk about 'leadership'. I now see 'leadership' as an active principle of relatedness between leaders and followers and their purposes and resistance. I can now more clearly see the existence of leadership in its three forms: as a word, a concept, and related phenomena.